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ABSTRACT

This feasibility study examined the need and the appropriateness of developing a videotape targeted to parents of young children with disabilities. The study involved a review of the literature, interviews with experts and practitioners, a focus group discussion to elicit the opinions and suggestions of parents of children with disabilities, development of preliminary design specifications, and a survey of promotion and delivery options. The proposed videotape would have Hispanics as its target audience and would promote the psychomotor, social, and emotional development of children, ages 4 to 6, through the use of age-appropriate arts activities. The videotape builds on the model of "Start with the Arts," an early childhood educational program that uses visual arts, creative movement, creative drama, and music to provide meaningful learning experiences in mainstreamed settings. The videotape could fulfill a need for parent training concerning the school activities of children with disabilities, and perhaps have a positive "ripple effect" of strengthening relationships among children, parents, teachers, and schools. Appendices provide a bibliography of approximately 60 items on parenting and children with disabilities, and a copy of the interview instrument. (JDD)

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An Investigation of a Parenting Videotape Targeted to Parents of Young Children with Disabilities

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FINAL REPORT

Phase I

U.S. Department of Education
SBIR Contract No. RN93082023

David D. McKinney, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

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VSA Educational Services

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INTRODUCTION

VSA Educational Services undertook this Phase I feasibility study to determine the need and the appropriateness of developing a videotape targeted to parents of young children with disabilities. The videotape will focus on promoting the psychomotor, social, and emotional development of these young children, ages four to six, through the use of age-appropriate arts activities. This Final Report incorporates the findings of our Phase I research effort, during which we conducted an extensive review of the relevant literature, interviewed experts and practitioners across the country, and worked with our Design Team to develop preliminary design specifications for the proposed videotape. All these activities reflect the proposal submitted by VSA Educational Services for Phase I funding and establish the necessary research base for the full-scale development of the videotapes during Phase II.

FUNDING

Funding for the Phase I feasibility study was provided through the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program of the U.S. Department of Education. A renewal of the contract for Phase II is being sought to implement the design plan created under Phase I.

OBJECTIVES

The activities of Phase I explored the viability and possible content of the proposed videotape. In undertaking this feasibility study, we sought to:

1. Investigate the specific parenting issues involved in nurturing young children with disabilities ages four to six ;

2. Investigate a preliminary design for the promotion and distribution of the proposed videotape;

3. Develop a preliminary design for the proposed videotape, building on the model of *Start with the Arts*, an early childhood educational program that uses the arts to provide meaningful learning experiences in mainstreamed settings for young children with disabilities ages four to six; and

4. Prepare and disseminate the final Phase I design specifications report.

SUMMARY OF PHASE I ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Toward meeting the objectives of Phase I in determining the viability of the proposed videotape, VSA Educational Services successfully accomplished the following:

- Identified, reviewed, and analyzed the salient literature on parenting;
- Identified and interviewed top experts and practitioners in the fields of parenting, early childhood education, early childhood special education, and art education;
- Held a Design Team meeting to reach a consensus on fundamental principles to guide the development of the content of the proposed parenting videotape;
- Conducted a Focus Group to elicit the opinions and suggestions of parents of children with disabilities regarding the videotape; and
- Surveyed promotion and delivery options.

The ensuing chapters elaborate on these accomplishments and indicate their relation to the framework of existing research and practice in parenting training. The findings recorded in the following pages point to a need for parent training that is tied to what children with disabilities do in school, having the positive "ripple effect" of strengthening the various relationships among children, parents, teachers, and schools. Overwhelmingly, research and experience have shown that when these relationships are strengthened, children with disabilities are most able to develop to their full potential.

Chapter 1

PARENTING: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

The passage of P.L. 94-142 in 1975 of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and then in 1986 of P.L. 99-457, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments, Part H--Handicapped Infants and Toddlers, has implications beyond the classroom for young children with disabilities: Both laws mandate parental involvement. Though experts widely agree that parental involvement is a key in the success of an early childhood education program, and parents indicate overwhelmingly that they want to participate more fully in their child's education, there also is general agreement that, due to a number of factors, compliance is often honored more in word than in deed. The call for parental involvement presents both an enormous challenge and an incredible opportunity for parents, teachers, and schools to work more closely together to promote the development of young children and to prepare them for mainstreamed programs and for ultimate functioning beyond the classroom. One of the ways experts and practitioners call for parents to become involved is through parent training. In order to be successful, parent training must be culturally sensitive and built on a model that recognizes the strengths of the family.

To help meet these challenges, VSA Educational Services undertook this study of parenting training to determine how we could assist children, parents, teachers, and schools to meet the needs of parents in promoting their child's learning. The following background information serves as the basis of our design plan for the proposed training package.

STATE OF PARENTING EDUCATION

The importance of parental involvement in a child's education has been emphasized in recent literature. Despite current attention, the first studies to report on the impact of parent involvement on a child's learning were published only 20 years ago. In his *Report on Longitudinal Evaluations of Preschool Programs* (1974), Urie Bronfenbrenner concluded that children who were disadvantaged who participated in intervention programs showed higher and more durable gains if their mothers were actively involved in their learning (cited in Rioux & Berla, 1993). He also found that the most long-lasting gains were made in a two-year program in which tutors visited homes twice weekly and demonstrated the use of toy kits to mothers and children.

Ten years later, University of Illinois researcher Herbert Walberg (cited in Rioux & Berla, 1993) reported that family participation was twice as predictive of learning as family socioeconomic status and that some parent involvement programs caused results 10 times as large [as did

socioeconomic status]. Walberg also found that the same parent involvement programs additionally benefited other children in the family who were not directly involved.

Today, researchers are continuing to show the dramatic, positive effects of parent involvement on their child's learning. Subsequent studies and practitioner experience, in fact, have proven so conclusively the importance of parent involvement in a child's education that last year more than 80% of teachers polled across the United States said that promoting parental involvement in a child's education should be the first or second priority on the nation's education agenda (Richardson, 1993). Seventy percent of those teachers also said that the government should help disadvantaged parents participate in their child's learning, including full funding for Head Start. Indeed, other educators have called parent involvement "a major component of efforts to restructure or improve schools throughout the nation" (Flaxman & Inger, 1992, pp. 16-17).

Is all of this clamoring, as Peggy Greenberg asked in the title of an article in *Young Children*, "a new American fad?" The answer, to be sure, is a definite no. As Greenberg herself responds to the question later in the article:

> Our public school system was *founded* by parents . . . [who] realized the need for their children to learn the 3 Rs, patriotism and citizenship if they were to be able to maintain the socioeconomic positions and quality of life (as we currently call it) that their parents were enjoying (1989, p. 64).

Parents still want to be involved. A study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in early 1980s reported that of all the parents surveyed, 95% said they wanted to be more involved in their child's education (cited in Rioux and Berla, 1993). The interest is there, obviously, on the part of the educational system and of parents. The question is, more accurately, how can parents learn best how to participate more fully and successfully in their child's learning?

Bronfenbrenner, in the vanguard of those who found a positive link between parent involvement and a child's learning, was also in the vanguard of those who pointed out the adverse conditions under which some parents attempt to parent:

> "[Many] families," he said, "live under such oppressive circumstances that they are neither willing nor able to participate in the activities required by a parent intervention program. Inadequate health care, poor housing, lack of education, low income and the necessity for full-time work . . . rob parents of time and energy to spend with their children (cited in Dunst, 1988, p. 1).

Most of us are well aware that these adverse conditions, pointed out by Bronfenbrenner in 1975, are, unfortunately, still very much with us. In a recent study, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the number of poor Americans grew by 1.2 million in 1992 to a total of 36.9 million. The poverty rates for Blacks (33%) and for Hispanics (29%) were significantly higher than those for Whites (12%), and 40% of those living in poverty were children ("Number of poor," 1993). In addition to worsening economic conditions, an accompanying social change makes parent participation in a child's learning increasingly problematic: the need or desire of women to work outside the home. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that by the year 2000, more than 75% of mothers of children under age six will be working outside the home; the numbers have nearly doubled since 1975 (Dunst, 1988).

In light of these realities, Bronfenbrenner, Dunst, and others have argued since the early 1980s that, in order to be successful in working with families, particularly with those who have been robbed "of time and energy to spend with their children," one must rethink the intervention approaches that have been relied on the past. These approaches, well-intentioned as they may have been, were based on a help-seeker/help-giver paradigm, often emphasized treatment and (as we now know) fostered learned helplessness (these approaches were founded on the "deficit model"). Instead, these researchers said, we must learn to take a stance that is proactive and creates opportunities for competence -- opportunities, they argue, that are "enabling" and "empower" a person to "acquire a sense of control necessary to manage family affairs" (Dunst, 1988, p. 4). Dunst cites Rappaport's 1981 definition of empowerment:

> Empowerment implies that many competencies are already present or at least possible. . . . [Empowerment] implies that in those cases where new competencies need to be learned, they are best learned in a context of living life. . . . (p. 4).

Schools have heard the message, and across the country they are calling for parents to learn new competencies in the context of living life. Parents are being asked to choose their child's school, to join parent advisory councils (PACs), and to participate directly in school management. Much progress has been made, and various studies report dramatic improvements in the quality of schools and of children's learning.

One example -- and one that is cited often in the literature -- is the parent-involvement program that took place under the direction of Dr. James Comer and colleagues at an elementary school in New Haven, CT. At the beginning of the study in 1969, the school was ranked 32nd out of 33 elementary schools on standardized achievement tests. By 1986, although the socioeconomic and ethnic makeup of the school had remained the same, it was ranked third in academic achievement and

consistently ranked first or second in the city in attendance (cited in Flaxman & Inger, 1992). Dr. Comer attributed the dramatic turnaround to "meaningful parent involvement, including membership on a school management team that sets objectives and strategies regarding school climate, academics, and staff development (p. 17). Dr. Comer also cited as a part of the program's success the fact that the parents were involved in parent training.

Other successful programs described in the literature also note that parent training is an important component of their success. Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) are two well-known models whose names surface often. So does Urie Bronfenbrenner and Moncrieff Cochran's Family Matters program, which operates out of Cornell University. Although all three of these programs teach parents the traditional skills one would expect, such as techniques in how to monitor their child's homework, they also help the parent develop communication skills that promote learning and demonstrate activities that encourage effective parent-child interactions. These skills and activities, learned in the context of living life, are precisely the kind of competencies that build on a parents' existing strengths, enabling and empowering them to participate in their child's learning more fully and successfully.

Another key to the success of PET, STEP, Family Matters and others that build on the empowerment model appears to be how these programs establish a continuity between what is learned in school and what is reinforced at home. As noted by Greenberg, when a member of the child's family takes part in his or her school life, this "positive participation sends a signal to the child: The family endorses this other world . . . (p. 62)." One of our interviewees emphasized that parents are not only a child's first teacher, but they also determine whether what it is learned in school is going to be reinforced or contradicted (Hendricks, telephone interview, December 1, 1993). Hendricks went on to say that nowhere is this continuity between what is learned in school and what is reinforced at home more important than it is with a child who has disabilities, for whom mixed signals are the most confusing.

PARENTING OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

One of the experts cited most often on the subject of parenting a child with a disability is Ann P. Turnbull, Ph.D., director of the Bureau of Child Research, Beach Center on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas. Not only is Turnbull a theorist of keen mind, candor, and straightforward approach -- she also is the mother of a grown son with a disability, and she knows whereof she speaks. In an article written in 1988 titled "The challenge of providing comprehensive support to families," she called the effective implementation of P.L. 99-457, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments--Handicapped Infants

and Toddlers, the "greatest opportunity" (p. 261) ever for forging family-professional partnerships and for providing comprehensive and effective support to families who have a child with a disability. P.L. 99-457 (which was formulated using the theories of Urie Bronfenbrenner), calls for

> enhancing the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers -- as teaching critical skills that will evolve over time leading to adult competence and community integration (Turnbull, 1988, p. 261).

The overall approach, then, is to serve the young child, with a view toward ultimate functioning, within the context of serving the entire family. Parenting a child with a disability is a marathon that involves the whole family, Turnbull explains, calling the "capacity for sustained effort . . . one of the most important marathon skills of all (p. 268)."

Most would agree with the analogy: parenting a child is a marathon. And -- as most experts agree -- there is very little to prepare a parent for it. Lynda F. Pearl (1993) notes that families have many different reactions to the discovery of a child's developmental delay, and most studies have shown higher levels of stress in families who have a child with a disability (Byrne & Cunningham, 1985, cited in Flagg-Williams, 1991). But, despite these powerful and sometimes challenging emotions, "parents want to feel competent and capable" (Smith, 1993, p. 2). They want to do the right thing.

In fact, studies have shown that acquiring early competence in parenting skills is particularly crucial for parents of a child with a disability. As James A. Blackman wrote in the Foreword to *Family-Centered Early Intervention with Infants and Toddlers: Innovative Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (1993):

> Federal and state mandates have acknowledged several important facts: children with developmental concerns require individualized attention, *interventions should begin as early as possible* [emphasis added], family needs and preferences are preeminent, and prevention is more effective and less costly than amelioration (p. ix).

Blackman goes on to say that "there are sensitive, if not critical, periods in early human development, and that infants and toddlers cannot wait for eventual improvements in their learning environments" (p. ix). Numerous studies suggest that positive changes in the cognitive development of young children are strongly associated with the quality of parent-child interactions. One of these studies (Rauh, Achenbach, Nurcomb, Howell, & Teti, 1989, cited in Pearl, 1993, p. 91) indicates that promoting "sensitive transactions between parent and child" over 11 one-hour sessions effected significant differences in scores on abilities for as long as four years after the study . Researchers already have

identified a number of these interaction characteristics that are associated with children's early cognitive, language, and social development, including sensitivity, responsiveness, and enjoyment, among others (Mahoney & Powell, 1988). The challenge is, then, how best to promote these positive behaviors between parents and their young child who has a disability.

Unfortunately, the history of parents and service providers -- in this case, those who have traditionally been charged with early intervention and assisting parents with an infant or child with developmental delays -- is not an altogether productive one. Gargiulo and Graves, in an article titled "Parental feelings: The forgotten component when working with parents of handicapped preschool children" (1991) called the relationship between providers and parents frequently "gloomy and counterproductive" (p. 176). Research, both statistical and anecdotal, suggests that territoriality is a common problem, with an accompanying unwillingness to recognize each other's strengths. Parents sometimes view the relationship as adversarial, and teachers have gone so far as to blame parents for causing (or at least not preventing) their child's disability (Seligman, 1979, cited in Gargiulo & Graves, 1991).

This "gloomy and counterproductive" history appears, on some fronts at least, to be reversing itself. Gargiulo and Graves (1991) note, on the positive side, that the role of parents of a child with a disability has changed from "one of mere recipient of services to that of active participant" (p. 177). And Bruce L. Baker, in *Parent Training and Developmental Disabilities* (1989), writes that parents, once considered "silent extras" in the provision of services for their child with a developmental disability, now are given "a leading role" (p. 5). The results of a study by Gerald Mahoney and Amy Powell in 1988 suggested that "service providers *can* [emphasis added] effectively promote the development of handicapped children by focusing their intervention on helping parents become more responsive interactional partners" (p. 94). Another study, conducted by Mahoney and Patricia O'Sullivan two years later, however, unfortunately showed that, although service providers cited family intervention goals frequently, 47% of those surveyed reported spending no time with families during a typical week (1990).

It appears, at least, that most service providers who work with parents who have a child with a disability are aware of the importance of parent involvement, and a study conducted in 1990 reported that 83% of service providers surveyed who work with young children and their families cited "enhanced parenting skills" as of primary concern (Roberts & Wasik, cited in Pearl, 1993, p. 93). It also appears that service providers are aware that a home environment that encourages learning is a key in the positive development of a child with a disability and that building on a family's strengths constitutes the most successful intervention approach -- even if their behaviors are not as quick to follow the theories they espouse as one might hope. The challenges are great, and there is much

to be done. An area where the challenge is perhaps the greatest is with those families who have a child with a disability in which racial and ethnic (i.e., cultural) differences create additional barriers.

CULTURAL ISSUES AND PARENTING

During the past 20 or 30 years serious attention has begun to be paid and research conducted into the impact of cultural factors on disability and the perceptions that surround it. Milton Seligman points out in "Cultural reactions to childhood disability and subcultural variation" (1989) that the birth of a child with a disability into a family

> has different meanings in various societies throughout the world. . . . Values attached to disability have varied both geographically and historically. In ancient Sparta, malformed babies were thrown over a precipice; yet in some societies the disabled [persons] are believed to have supernatural powers . . . (p. 183).

Seligman cites an earlier study by Safilios-Rothschild (1970), which suggested that attitudes toward disability vary in any culture based on, among other things, its level of development, beliefs about individual sin causing disability, and its values attached to different physical conditions. From this study and others, Seligman concluded that "attitudes and behavior [toward children who have disabilities] are thus shaped by subculture" (p. 187). In other words, an intervention approach that works with one culture would not necessarily work with another.

As this point in our investigation, we recognized that for our parenting program to be successful and effective, we had to choose one specific cultural group as our target audience and attempt to meet the needs of its parents who have children with disabilities. Based on the most current research, our parenting program must take into consideration the multiple variables that would affect its presentation and reception, including the prevalence of and attitudes toward disabilities in the target population, instructional preferences, and, importantly, the way members of the family interact in that culture. After some consideration, we decided to target the Hispanic population.

The Hispanic population constitutes the second largest minority group in the United States -- and, at the current rate of growth (53% over the past 10 years), Hispanics will become the largest minority group early in the next century (Peters-Rivera & Paulino, 1994). Hispanics also were the only major racial/ethnic group in the United States to experience an absolute decline in income over the 1980s (Pérez & Martínez, 1993). If current trends continue, half of all Hispanic children will be poor by the year 2010 (Cohen, 1993); and, according to the National Council of La Raza, a preeminent advocacy organization for the U.S. Hispanic

population, lack of educational attainment may be the single greatest cause of Hispanic poverty. Twelve percent of Hispanics have less than a fifth-grade education (Pérez & Martínez, 1993); a Hispanic Policy Development Project report titled *Together is Better* (1990) argues that the successful education of Hispanic young people will require "that schools and families function as full partners in the education of children" (p. 6).

One of the key culprits prohibiting the formation of these effective partnerships -- and one cited throughout the literature -- has been the language barrier. Eugene E. Garcia, in an article titled "'Hispanic children: Theoretical, empirical, and related policy issues" (1992), cites additional reasons for the lack of educational attainment in the U.S. Hispanic population, including the Americanization assimilation model, the belief among certain educators that bilingualism is a needless mental burden for at-risk students, and the differences between the cultures of home and school. Garcia explains that

> lack of consideration for the distinction between home and school culture renders educational endeavors for these culturally distinct students likely to fail. . . . The difference between school culture and home culture leads to an educationally harmful dissonance (pp. 72-73).

There is, then, little of the "continuity between home and school" that numerous other studies have called crucial in the learning of young children, particularly those with disabilities.

Studies also have indicated, however, that Hispanic parents want more information on how best to help their children. (Hispanics were included, for example, in the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory survey in early 1980s mentioned earlier that reported 95% of parents wanted to be more involved in their child's education.) In addition, an article in *Publishers Weekly* in 1991 titled "Spanish in the libraries" reported that in the Bay Area libraries in California (the state with the largest Hispanic population) two of the most sought-after titles in Spanish were on childbirth and parenting (Knappman & Ginsburg, p. 31).

As this feasibility study was being written, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) was in the final stages of preparing a report titled *Disabilities in the Hispanic Community* . VSA Educational Services obtained a draft manuscript (1994), which contained much valuable information, including the sobering facts that one in every fifteen Americans with a disability is Hispanic, and that Hispanics constitute nearly 7% of the entire U.S. population with disabilities. We will continue to stay in contact with NCLR as their final report is being published; it is certain to be a key resource for the full-scale development of the parenting training program during Phase II. During Phase II we will also conduct additional

research to make sure that the parent-child activities modeled in the videotape are designed to appeal to the broadest spectrum of the U.S. Hispanic population.

Our first-hand research indicates that most existing parenting organizations and schools would welcome a parenting training package that is culturally sensitive, builds on the existing strengths of families, and takes advantage of everyday activities that occur in the home to promote learning. Such a package would assist them not only in meeting the mandates of both P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457, but also in better accommodating the basic intent of both laws, which emphasizes the "empowerment model" of family intervention and, in so doing, strengthens families. Our research additionally indicates that parents of all races and ethnic groups are interested in promoting the development of their children with disabilities, and that, with the proper training, parents -- even those of limited education -- are able to make a substantive difference in the academic achievements of their children.

The next chapter details the activities of our investigation, step-by-step.

Chapter 2

PHASE I ACTIVITIES

The activities described below indicate the process by which VSA Educational Services developed the initial design specifications for the proposed parenting videotape targeted to parents of young children with disabilities ages four to six. The purpose of these activities was threefold:

1. To determine the current state of parenting education and the factors that affect it;

2. To investigate the best means to promote parents' involvement in their child's education and to strengthen the relationship between parents and teachers; and

3. To develop a preliminary design plan for the parenting videotape that could be used as an independent program or in tandem with the *Start with the Arts* early childhood educational program.

Toward these goals, VSA Educational Services:

- Conducted an exhaustive search of the literature;
- Identified experts and practitioners in parenting, early childhood education, early childhood special education, art education, and related fields;
- Developed an interview instrument;
- Selected and interviewed experts and practitioners;
- Conducted a Design Team meeting;
- Conducted a Focus Group involving parents of children with disabilities;
- Investigated promotion and delivery options;
- Drafted a preliminary design document; and
- Compiled a final report.

Before initiating these activities, we consulted with experts at George Washington University, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Parent Action, and the Rosemount Center/El Centro Rosemount to seek their advice regarding the design and execution of

the study. They reviewed our initial proposal and suggested revisions, as well as submitted names of experts and practitioners for consultation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

VSA Educational Services undertook an extensive search of resources related to parenting and parenting of children with disabilities, including the impact of cultural diversity. This review included on-line searches of the following databases: Dissertation Abstracts, ECER (Exceptional Children Education Resources), ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), and PsycINFO (Psychological Abstracts Information Services). Subject searches for monographs and analytics were conducted through DCAT, the on-line catalog of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA.

From this review, we found that the research on parenting and parenting of children with disabilities is broad and diverse (and that research on the impact of cultural diversity, in its infancy in the '80s, is growing rapidly). Aspects of parenting research include:

- The current push for parent (i.e., family) involvement in the child's education;
- How best to address the parenting needs of a diverse and changing population; and
- The impact of cultural factors on the above.

These areas of research are represented in several major professional journals (see Appendix A: Select Bibliography on Parenting and Children with Disabilities). Reports can be found in, among others, *Academic Therapy, American Psychologist, Child Development, Childhood Education, Education and Training in Mental Retardation, Educational Psychological Review, Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and the Family, Journal of School Psychology, Journal of Special Education, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, Learning Disability Quarterly, Mental Retardation, Perspectives Quarterly, Psychology in the Schools, Topics in Early Childhood Special Education,* and *Young Children.*

In addition to these journals, research on parenting, parenting children with disabilities, and cultural diversity has been reported in various monographs and special reports. These reports include, but are not limited to, publications of the Beach Center on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas, the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, and special reports of the National Council of

La Raza in Washington, DC, and the Tomás Riviera Center in Claremont, CA, both of which serve the Hispanic* population in the United States.

To supplement the published research, we contacted researchers in the fields of education, the arts, and cultural diversity to obtain copies of works in progress. In addition, we obtained copies of program and curricular materials used in working with children with disabilities and their parents. (One set of materials, for example, included a videotape used in Dade County Public Schools Project PLEES [Prekindergarten for Limited English Exceptional Students] to work with children and their parents who speak Haitian-Creole.)

Despite the variety within the parenting literature and educational materials, certain basic themes recur. One of the most important is that parents are a child's *first* teacher and that a child with disabilities is served best when parents and teachers are working together. Although P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457 were passed in 1974 and 1986 respectively and both call for parental involvement, many parents continue to feel disenfranchised from their child's education. Those feelings of disenfranchisement appear heightened among parents of certain cultures.

Ways to "bridge the gap" between home and school and to strengthen the relationship between parents and teachers are currently being explored across the country. But there is general agreement that in order to be successful, an approach must take into account the family's culture, including, broadly, its language and the dynamics of its members' roles).

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Another important step in the feasibility study was the design of an interview instrument to guide discussions of the proposed videotape with experts and practitioners in the fields of parenting, early childhood education, early childhood special education, art education, and related fields. The format of the interview instrument was designed to cover all aspects of the feasibility study (including the learning needs of young children ages four to six, the role parents play in helping their children with disabilities to learn, how teachers and parents work together, and the content and format of the proposed videotape). The interview protocol was kept flexible so that conversation could focus on the interviewee's individual experience and expertise. The format featured open-ended questions and allowed us to evaluate concepts identified in the literature as well as to solicit new ideas and practices.

A copy of the interview instrument is included in Appendix B.

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* Terminology is in transition; some groups prefer the more inclusive term "Latino." The U.S. Bureau of the Census continues to use "Hispanic," and we will conform to that usage for purposes of this feasibility study.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXPERTS AND PRACTITIONERS

To ensure a thorough knowledge of practice and theory in parenting and parenting training, VSA Educational Services interviewed 14 teachers (including teachers of teachers), researchers, and program developers. The criteria for selecting interviewees included:

- Experience in early childhood education;
- Experience in working with children with disabilities ages four to six;
- Experience working with parents of children with disabilities;
- Experience in program development and delivery; and
- Experience in cultural diversity.

In selecting interviewees, we identified persons who had expertise in at least four of these areas, the principal concern being their current involvement in working with parents of children with disabilities. The majority of the interviewees are parents, and three have children with disabilities. The experience of each interviewee in years by the above categories is outlined in Charts 1 - 5.

As part of the selection process, we made sure to identify persons who represented the diversity of the target audience. We made contact with and interviewed persons who have worked with children with disabilities and their parents who are African, African-American, American Indian, Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, French, Haitian, Hispanic, Indian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Korean, Pakistani, Thai, and Vietnamese. By broadening our understanding of parenting among different cultures, we hoped to ensure that the proposed videotape is culturally sensitive.

In addition, we also attempted to interview persons who had experience with different demographics, and our interviewees represented both public school-based and independent organizations in urban, suburban and rural areas. Of the specialists in special education, the interviewees all had experience working with young children with disabilities in mainstreamed settings.

Based on these considerations, we identified 18 candidates for interviews and conducted 14 interviews. Of the interviewees, six have doctoral degrees and four have master's, with an average 15 years of experience. The majority of interviewees were parents, and three have children with disabilities. Eleven are currently involved in either teaching children with disabilities or in training and supervising teachers to work with

children with disabilities; seven are currently engaged in educational research. All indicated a parent component in their programs.

The following persons were interviewed:

Martin E. Block, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of education at the University of Virginia. He specializes in physical education for young children with disabilities.

Loren E. Bucek, M.A., coordinates the dance and dance education program at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. She has worked in New York with children with disabilities and their parents for 10 years.

Kathy J. Channell is a teacher and administrative coordinator in Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia. She also coordinates Head Start for the county. She coordinated the field testing of the *Start with the Arts* program in Prince William County.

Maxine B. Freund, Ed.D.,* is chairperson of the Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Mary D. Hendricks, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of teacher education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She also has worked with Head Start and with the Association for Retarded Citizens. The teacher training program that she coordinates requires that potential teachers work directly with families of children with disabilities.

Sara J. Hines, M.Ed., M.A., is director of tutoring for the Lab School of Washington in Washington, DC, a school for children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities. She also is an adjunct professor of reading diagnosis and remediation at American University of Washington, DC.

Jane E. Hughes, M.A., RMT-BC, is a music therapist and exceptional student education music specialist at Leon County Schools in Tallahassee, FL.

Mark S. Innocenti, Ph.D., is a research associate and principal investigator at the Early Intervention Research Institute at Utah State University in Logan.

Merle B. Karnes, Ph.D., is professor emeritus in the Department of Special Education in the College of Education at the University of

* Denotes a member of the Design Team.

Illinois in Champaigne. She has been involved in the education of children with disabilities for more than 50 years. She is currently working on assessment instruments for young children.

Lenore Blank Kelner is an expressive therapist who uses dramatics to help students with disabilities develop language and thinking skills. As director of Interact Story Theatre, she has taken her comprehensive program (which promotes parent-child interactions) to more than 80 schools in Washington, DC, and Baltimore, MD.

Sally A. Levi is a resource and therapeutic teacher as well as department chair at the Children's Guild Inc. in Baltimore, MD. The school's teachers and social workers work with the parents of every child who is enrolled.

M. Carmen S. Ramirez is president of Schools Are For Everyone (SAFE). For two years she was area development director of the Texas Parent Training and Information Center in Beaumont, TX, and she also has served as education committee chairperson for the Association of Retarded Citizens.

Zilkia Rodriguez-Gavilo is a prekindergarten bilingual educational specialist in the Division of Exceptional Student Education of Dade County Public Schools in Miami, FL. She also has 8 years' experience with Head Start. She is a native of Puerto Rico.

Carol H. Valdivieso, Ph.D. is director of the Disabilities Studies and Services Center for the Academy for Educational Development. She also is director of the Federal Resource Center and principal investigator for the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY). She organized the first Head Start program in New York City.

INTERVIEWS OF EXPERTS AND PRACTITIONERS

Interviews were conducted by Diana G. Westbrook, M.A., project associate. Interviews took an average time of 1 to 1.5 hours, and all were conducted over the telephone. Telephone interviews allowed contact with leading practitioners and researchers regardless of their location and ensured that the interviewees covered a broad demographic base. Indeed, the interviewees were representative of every region of the United States, being located in seven different states and the District of Columbia (see Chart 6).

CHART 1 - Interviewees' Experience with Early Childhood Education in Years

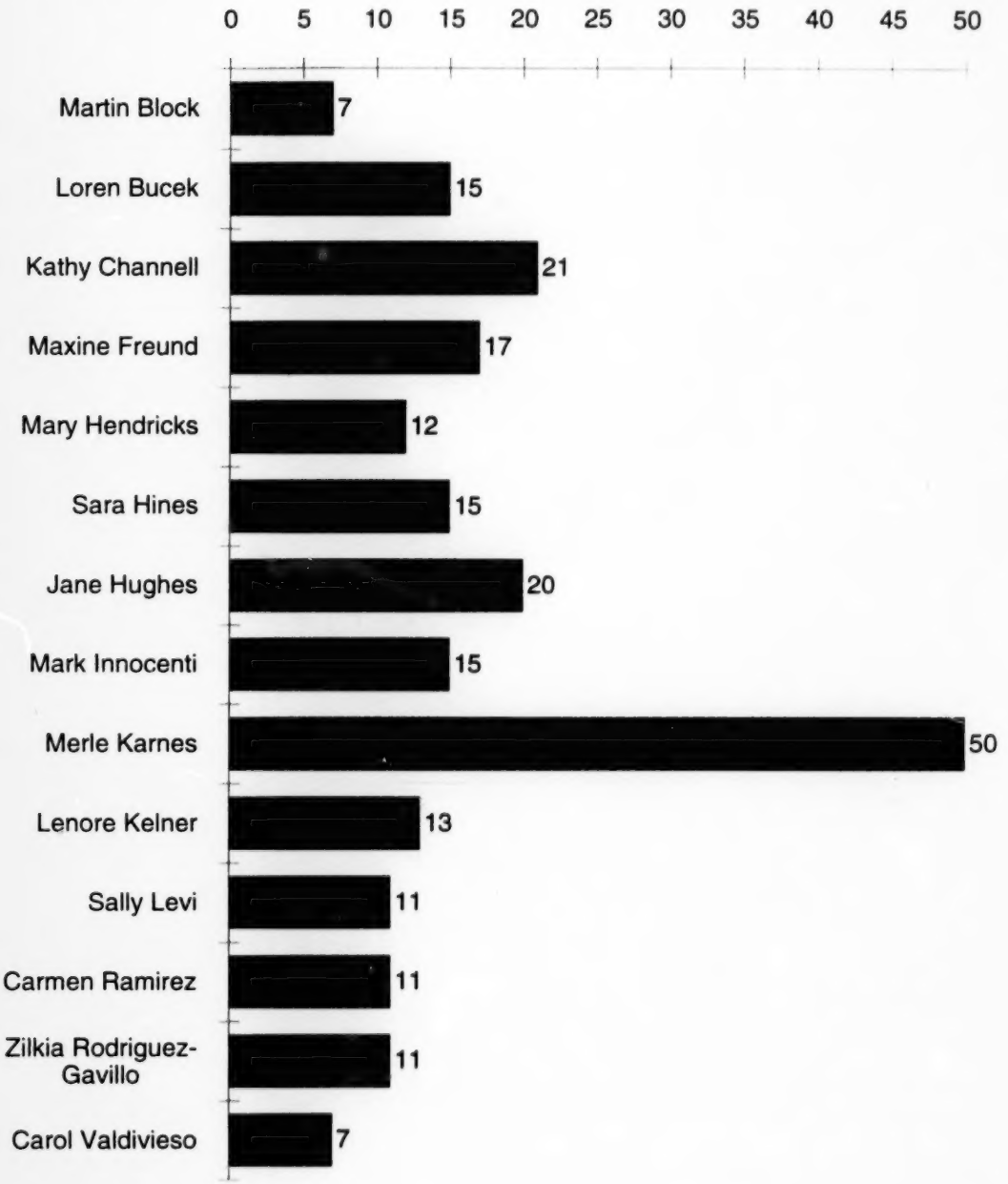

CHART 2 - Interviewee's Experience with Children with Potential Learning Difficulties in Years

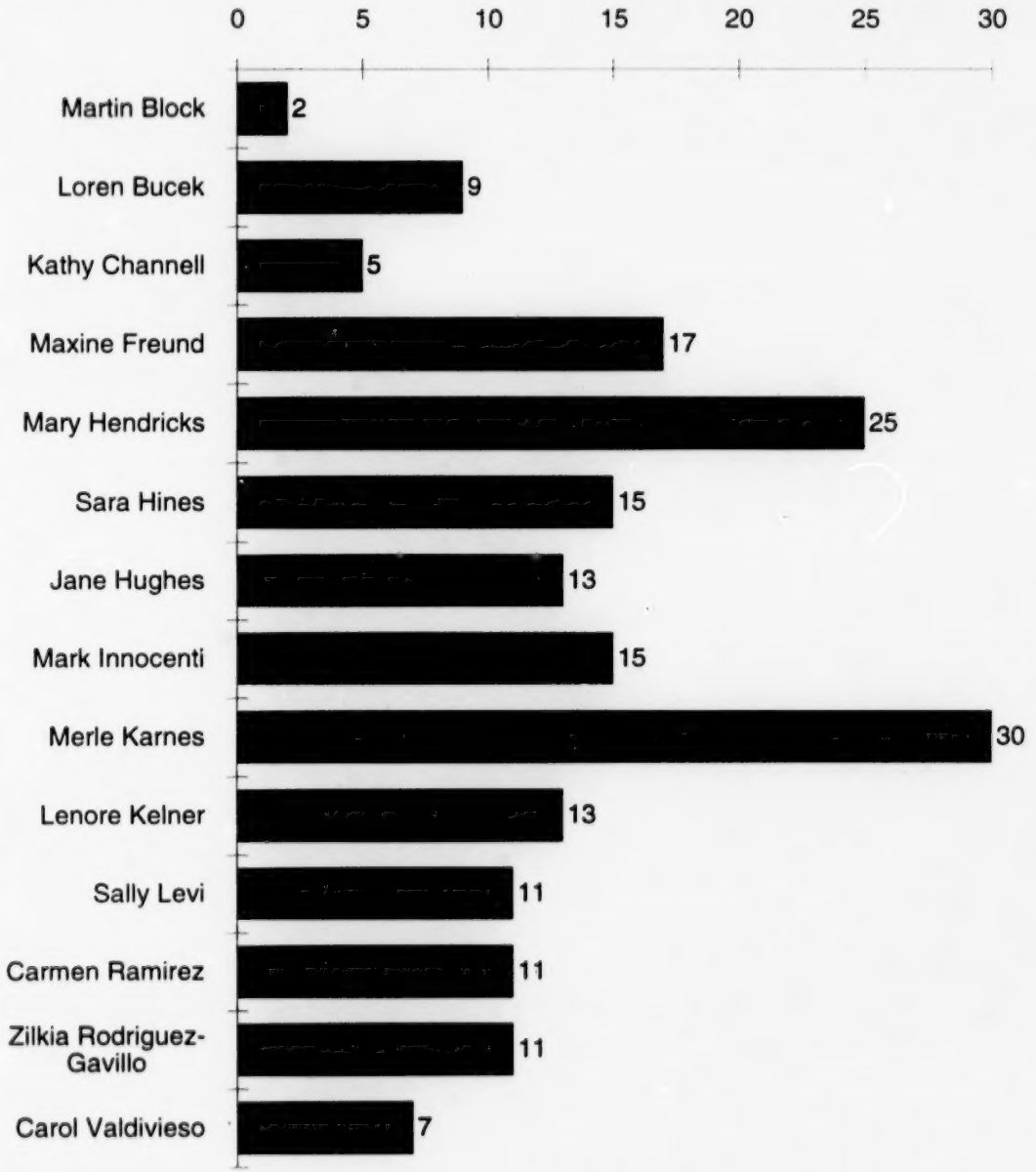

CHART 3 - Interviewees' Experience with Parents of Children with Potential Learning Difficulties in Years

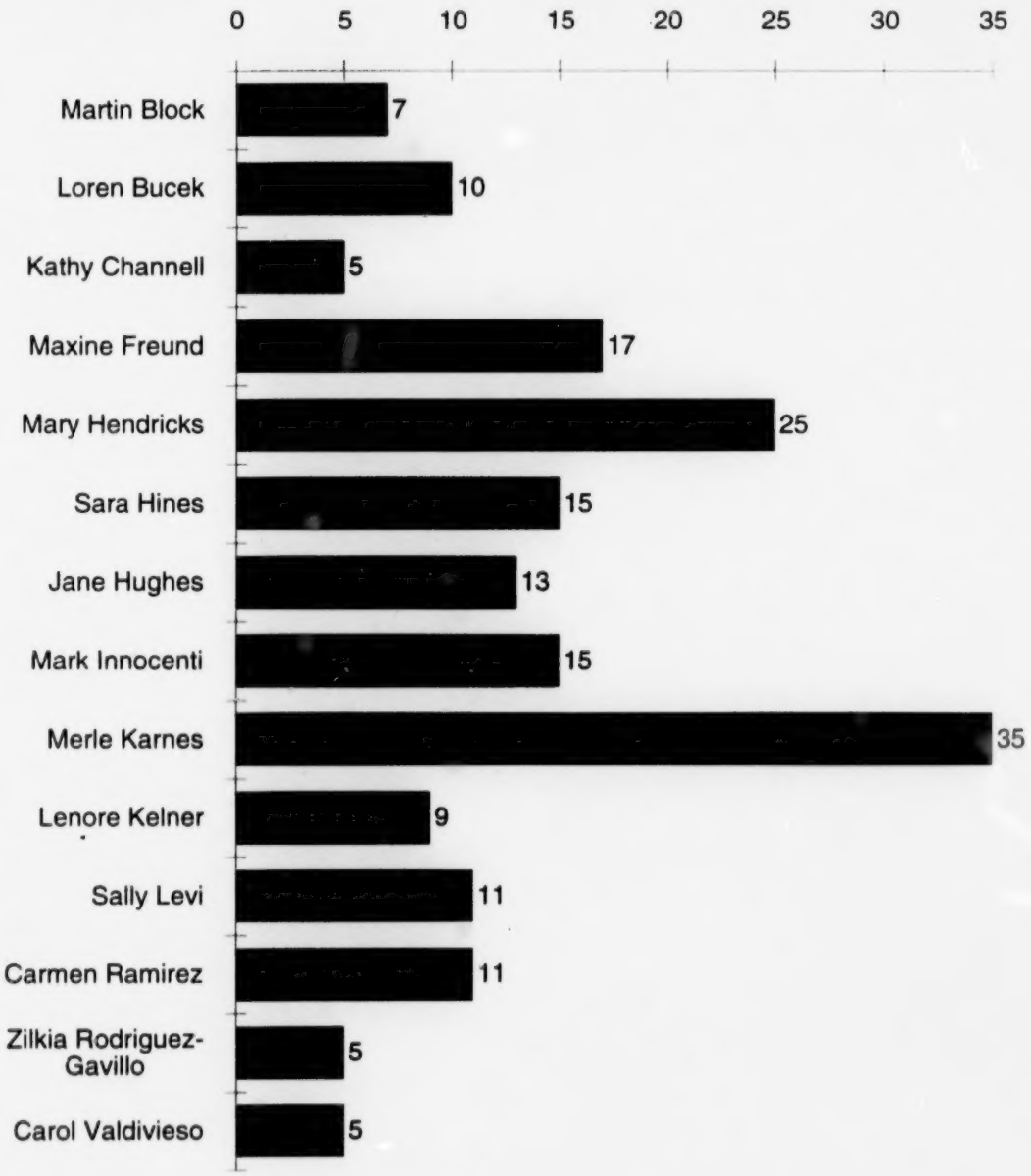

CHART 4 - Interviewees' Experience with Cultural Diversity in Years

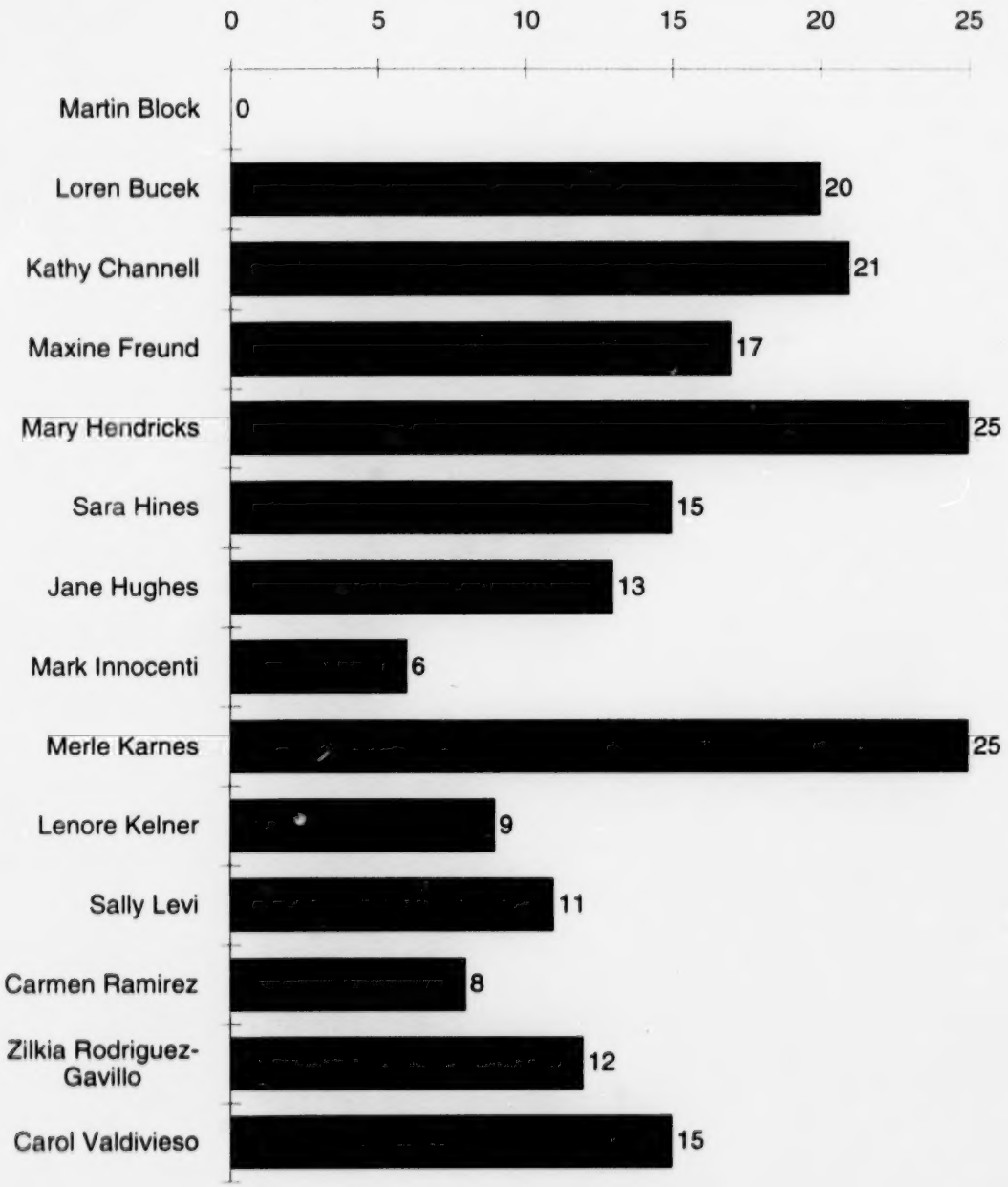

CHART 5 - Interviewees' Experience in Program Development in Years

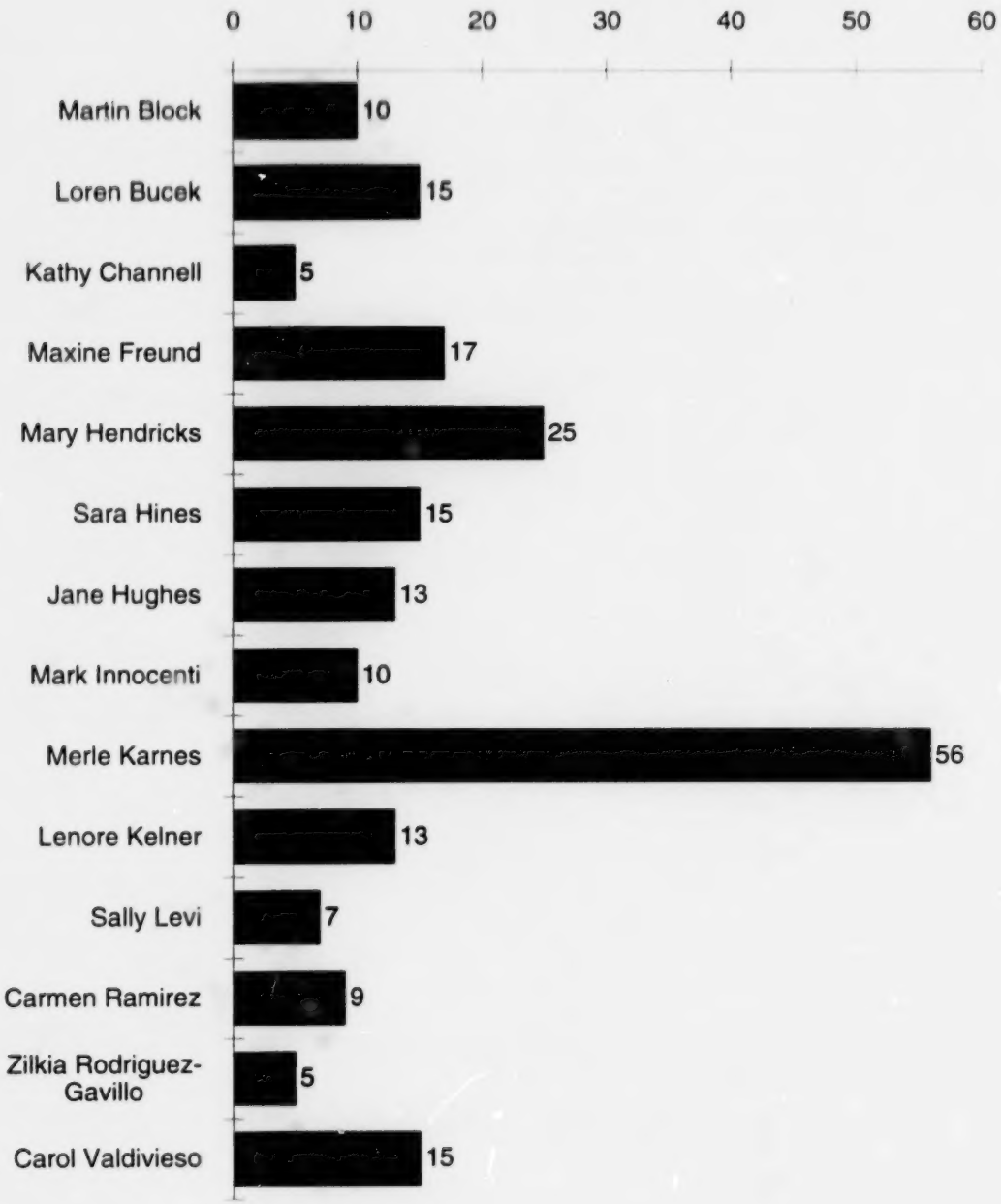

CHART 6

Interviews by State

Home State of Interviewee

The themes and scope of the interview varied with the expert. Some of the interviewees focused on general topics and discussed their overall philosophies of parenting; others talked about specific programs and program adaptations with which they had experience that sought to include parents in the education of children with disabilities. The comments of these experts and practitioners fell into the following categories:

- The learning needs of young children ages four to six;
- The role of the arts in addressing those needs;
- The role parents play in helping young children with disabilities to learn;
- Audience;
- Design of the parenting program; and
- Delivery of the program.

The following generalizations can be drawn from the expert interviews as a group. These comments reinforce the findings of our literature review and support the need for parent training that is culturally sensitive, tied to what children with disabilities do in school, and connected with everyday activities.

The Learning Needs of Young Children Ages Four to Six

There was general agreement among the interviewees regarding the learning needs of young children ages four to six. They stressed the importance of play, of developmentally appropriate activities, and of adults (both teachers and parents) allowing the child to explore his or her world.

Most also mentioned the following "textbook" components of a child's learning needs: cognitive, physical, emotional, and social. They also mentioned "school survival skills," i.e., learning how to deal with peers and adults, learning how to take directions, and learning how to concentrate on a task, among others. Sally Levi emphasized that it is important to

> use play as the vehicle through which they [children] develop in those specific areas. . . . It's my feeling that . . . we need to allow them the materials and the environment in which they feel safe to explore and make discoveries, rather than the didactic approach. . . . It's more of a partnership.

Maxine Freund additionally noted that it is important to help parents become cognizant of the "variations in patterns of growth and development" in their children. Many of the interviewees mentioned that it is not theory that parents want and need, but help in getting through an ordinary day with their children who have disabilities.

The Role of the Arts

There was general (and enthusiastic) consensus among the interviewees: The arts should be a vital part of any comprehensive early childhood curriculum. As the senior member among the interviewees (who had more than 50 years of experience in early childhood education and program development) said: "I think that everything that the child needs to know can be learned through the arts."

The reasons given for support of the arts as a vital part of a child's education were varied but followed a few common themes. Although the arts are like "play" for a child, painting, for example, teaches sequencing and spatial arrangement, creative movement teaches body awareness and focus (a significant key to success for a child with a disability), drama teaches cooperation with peers and adults, and music teaches listening -- just to name a few of the learning needs met by the arts.

Another reason for emphasizing the arts with children, particularly those with disabilities, is that the arts provide "open-ended" learning experiences, ones with "no right answer" in which their products (e.g., their paintings) are not compared with and evaluated against the work of others. Individual expression is encouraged and rewarded, providing an important self-esteem builder, particularly for children with disabilities.

Lenore Blank Kelner related the story of a young boy in one of her classes who didn't talk and whose lack of speech was about to prevent him from entering speech therapy. The "story theatre" exercises that Kelner designed, however, provided just the vehicle he needed; now, she says, "he's taking the class to a whole new level."

The Role of Parents

All 14 interviewees stressed that parents are a child's *first* teacher. They also stressed that the role of "parent as teacher" is ongoing in a number of ways in the home, including the following:

- Parents are responsible for providing a safe environment for their child, the kind of environment the child feels safe to explore and learn from.
- Parents can reinforce a child's strengths and assist him or her in overcoming weaknesses by providing developmentally appropriate activities in the home.

- Parents can nurture a child's self-esteem and validate the child's self-worth by showing interest in what the child is interested in, even, as one interviewee said, "if it's worms."
- Because different families place emphasis on different things, they determine what things from the classroom are reinforced, and *how* they are reinforced.
- Reinforcing what is learned in the classroom is particularly important for children with disabilities, for whom "mixed messages" are especially confusing.
- Parents teach their children to value learning by being learners themselves.

A number of the interviewees remarked that many parents labor under the misconception that they have to work on "academic subjects" with their children in order to help them learn. The interviewees also remarked that parents frequently underestimate the importance of interactions during everyday activities in helping a child to learn.

As Mary Hendricks said, "When a child says, 'What does that say on the cereal box?' and the parent answers, then they are contributing to the child's early literacy." Hendricks additionally noted that parents have not been adequately trained to recognize the importance of those everyday activities in a child's learning. Helping parents recognize the value of these interactions and giving them additional techniques to "enhance what they are already doing" would be an important step in training parents of children with disabilities.

Audience

When asked how they would envision the*content* of the proposed parenting program, most interviewees began to talk about the importance of, first, deciding to target a *specific audience.*

As Kathy Channell said: "Parents aren't all alike. The inner city is very different from an urban center or a rural center -- it's so different. And what works in one area doesn't necessarily work in another." There was general agreement that for parent training to be effective, it must be culturally sensitive.

Mary Hendricks spoke to the issue even more directly, making the point that it is "important to communicate to [those in various cultural groups] that their culture is important. Part of what professionals need in order to be real partners with families . . . is to understand their culture." Educational and training programs, she noted, often "go for the middle, and it doesn't always speak to either end of the spectrum."

The interviewees who had direct experience with the Hispanic population (12 of the 14 interviewed) underscored the importance of being sensitive not just to the cultural differences *of* the Hispanic

community but also to those*within* the Hispanic community. Mark Innocenti cautioned that in "working with Hispanic populations, you'd be working with people from South America, from Cuba, from all over."

M. Carmen S. Ramirez defined herself as a "Chicano," that is, as a "Mexican-American who is culturally and politically aware" of her minority status. "You can't provide a Mexican background," she said, "if you're going to present [the parenting videotape] to Puerto Ricans or Cuban Americans. You have to be sensitive to each Hispanic subculture." At the same time, she warned, you must "be aware of stereotyping." Interviewees agreed that being aware of the parenting behaviors preferred by a particular group and additionally choosing parent-child activities that are realistic would go a long way toward making the videotape program culturally sensitive.

Design

When discussing the design of a training package for parents who have children with disabilities, most of the interviewees agreed that a videotape would be an efficient and cost-effective way to reach a large number of parents. There was also consensus that the videotape should portray parents and children together, modeling a variety of fun, arts-related activities that might easily occur naturally in the home as a part of the everyday routine. (The "talking head" approach was vetoed by all 14 interviewees.)

The interviewees also agreed that the activities the videotape portrays should be short, appealing, and practical. As Sally Levi said, the videotape should show

> different children in different circumstances. [It should contain] ideas for playing with children that aren't too messy . . . and [activities] to get parents to get up and move. You can't expect parents to just sit and watch it and go home and learn how to do it. The cultural differences should be paid attention to. Different cultures do behaviors differently, and we must be aware of that.

Carol Valdivieso stated specifically that she thought the best program would "have to be used in conjunction with what's going on in school," an idea that we found our Design Team agreed with and that was confirmed in the literature.

Delivery

Of the areas of discussion with interviewees, the topic of delivery received the most diverse responses, with many creative suggestions given for promotional activities. All, however, agreed that "the schools" were a natural place both to promote and to deliver the parenting

program. In addition, to link the videotape to an existing early childhood program -- one that is already in use in the schools -- would provide for integrated delivery and encourage home use. Experts agree that parents are most likely to become involved in an activity in which their child is already involved and interested.

DESIGN TEAM MEETING

After completing the review of the literature and conducting the interviews, we synthesized our findings in preparation for the Design Team meeting. We selected participants for the Design Team because of their expertise in parenting, early childhood education, early childhood special education, art education, cultural diversity and related fields. (A summary of this information is included in Chart 7.)

To fully acquaint the Design Team members with the scope of the feasibility study, we wrote a report summarizing our findings to date for distribution to participants. This report was intended to focus the attention of the participants on issues identified during the research phase and to stimulate discussion at the meeting.

The Design Team was charged with three specific objectives:

- To investigate basic issues related to parenting skills pertinent to children with disabilities ages four to six;
- To investigate cultural differences that affect parent-child interactions; and
- To investigate how the arts can enhance learning, creating, and parenting skills.

The Design Team members are:

Cathy Caruso, national programs coordinator for Very Special Arts.

Janet Rice Elman, assistant director of national programs for Very Special Arts.

Maxine B. Freund, Ed.D., chairperson of the Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education at George Washington University in Washington, DC. Dr. Freund also served as one of our expert interviewees.

Tom Hanley, contracting officer's technical representative from the U.S. Department of Education.

David D. McKinney, Ph.D., principal investigator for the Parenting Videotape project of VSA Educational Services.

Luzanne B. Pierce, senior program associate director, NEC*TAS, National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

Diane Powell, Ph.D., coordinator, Project DAISY, Transition/Integration Programs, Early Learning Years Branch, District of Columbia Public Schools.

Rosalie Streett, executive director, Parent Action.

Dolores Varnon, Ed.D., Design Team leader.

Diana Westbrook, M.A., consultant and project associate.

Jan Yocum de Calderón, executive director, the Rosemount Center/El Centro Rosemount.

After opening remarks by Dolores Varnon that focused on current trends in early childhood education, parenting, and the recent theories of developmental psychologist Howard Gardner on creativity and cognition in children, the group discussed the role of parents in a child's education.

Design Team participants agreed that parents are their child's first and most important teacher and that optimal instructional results can occur only when relationships among teachers, parents, and children are strengthened. They also agreed that parents are most likely to become involved in activities in which their child is already involved and interested, and that linking the proposed parenting videotape to an existing childhood program was a valid design feature.

In order to look at the research in more depth, Design Team participants were divided into two groups: one group reviewed and discussed the research on parenting education and the arts, and the other, cultural sensitivity and the arts. Group 1 concluded that play (celebrating individuality and diversity) should be an important component of parenting education related to the arts. Group 2 reported that taking into account the family's situation (the family's socioeconomic level, the language spoken at home, the dynamics of members' roles) was tantamount in developing an effective parenting program.

CHART 7

Background of Design Team Members by Category

	Early Childhood Education	Disability	Parenting	Cultural Diversity
Cathy Caruso	*	*	*	*
Janet Rice Elman	*	*		
Maxine Freund	*	*	*	
Tom Hanley	*	*		
David McKinney	*	*		*
Luzanne Pierce	*	*	*	
Diane Powell	*	*	*	*
Rosalie Streett	*	*	*	*
Dolores Varnon	*	*	*	
Diana Westbrook	*		*	*
Jan Yocum de Calderon	*	*	*	*

Participants also were given the opportunity to review two pertinent videotapes produced elsewhere. One, titled "Kindergarten: A Place for Learning," emphasized the importance of play in curricula designed for young children. The other, titled "Ready to Learn," was targeted toward parents, describing basic developmental milestones and offering guidelines on how parents can promote and nurture their child's development through appropriate responses and activities. Design Team participants agreed that, although both videotapes offered sound information, the approach of the second deserved high marks for (1) its cultural diversity, (2) including fathers, and (3) addressing decision-making.

Participants were encouraged by the potential of VSA Educational Services' proposed parenting videotape not only to enhance the abilities of parents in using age-appropriate arts activities to promote their child's development, but also to enhance an adult-to-adult, parent-teacher relationship. The videotape could help "bridge the gap" between parents and teachers, as well as empower parents by building self-esteem in working with their child at home. Participants agreed that a videotape that was activity-based, culturally sensitive, and showed parents and their children in realistic, everyday situations would be most likely to be not only well-received but effective.

FOCUS GROUP

Since a training program designed to assist parents in working with their children who may have disabilities cannot succeed unless it understands and represents the potential target audience, VSA Educational Services set up and participated in a Focus Group. The group was structured to solicit parent perspectives, ideas, and opinions related to parenting and the feasibility of developing a training program targeted to parents of young children with disabilities ages four to six. Data derived from the session has been incorporated into the Design Plan (see Chapter 3).

The Focus Group involved five participants (three female, two male) who are parents with children attending the Rosemount Center/El Centro Rosemount in Washington, DC. We chose the Rosemount Center because of the cultural and economic diversity of its constituency. It is a truly inclusive early childhood education program; its classes include young children with disabilities, young children from culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g., Vietnamese, Hispanic, African-American and others), and a wide range of economic circumstances.

The ethnic representation of the five participants included four Hispanics (three from El Salvador and one from Guatemala) and one African-American. Three participants spoke only Spanish, one of whom acknowledged an inability to read or write. The group included parents

of children with and without disabilities; their households included a total of 16 children. Disabilities represented were both developmental and orthopedic, including spina bifida.

Diana Westbrook, project associate, served as the facilitator, with Cathy Caruso, coordinator of national programs for Very Special Arts, and Amy Liss, administrative assistant for VSA Educational Services, serving as co-recorders. The session took a little more than one hour.

The session opened with an "ice-breaker" exercise in which participants were asked to describe a favorite activity that they do with their children. While all respondents listed multiple activities, most listed watching television with their children. The second most frequent response related to doing daily chores (e.g., running errands, cooking, cleaning, and the like). A follow-up question from the facilitator inquired about the types of programs they watched together. The Spanish-speaking participants noted that joint viewing by parent and child was exclusively Spanish-language, while children when viewing alone watched both Spanish- and English-language television.

The facilitator than asked in what activity participants spend the most time with their children. Again, television and daily chores predominated. Following up on this question, the facilitator inquired about the average amount of time that the parents spent with their children. Two parents noted that they spent all day with their children. One noted that he looked after his daughter in the afternoons. Another stated that there were lots of children in the household, and that the children usually played or watched television together. She was present in the house, but the interaction was generally between the children with her role as mediator of arguments.

The conversation then concentrated on children's activities. The group was asked about the toys with which the children played. Respondents noted cars, trucks, and dolls, and they emphasized that the children loved to use their imagination. They would invent activities (like storytelling with dolls) or would mimic daily routines (like "play eating").

The final segment of the Focus Group centered around what these parents thought that their children learned from them, and, in line with that, what they wanted their children to learn. Although these questions were asked separately, parents did not really answer the question of what their children learned from them. Instead, they responded primarily in terms of what they wanted their children to learn, and the responses to these questions were very specific. A predominant response was proper behavior as it related to such things as going to the grocery store and to the laundromat, and becoming more social (knowing when to be friendly and when to be cautious in talking to people). The group also mentioned language skills.

These candid responses from our target audience in the Focus Group confirmed the data collected from our review of the literature, interviews with experts and practitioners, and the Design Team meeting. Parents want to help their children learn and already spend a fair amount of time at home with their children. They appear, however, to undervalue the opportunities for learning presented by everyday activities. All the activities we conducted as part of this Phase I final report indicate that parents of young children with disabilities ages four to six would be well-served by a training program that helps them take better advantage of these frequent, everyday opportunities to prepare their children for success in a mainstreamed setting.

Chapter 3

DESIGN PLAN

The product articulated in this chapter represents a package that can be used as an independent program or in tandem with the *Start with the Arts* early childhood educational program. The proposed training package is intended to strengthen the abilities of parents in promoting the psychomotor, social, and emotional development of their young children with disabilities ages four to six. Although the program is designed with this specific use in mind, the activities that will be chosen to model parent and child behaviors can easily be adapted by other family members to promote development in other children in the family who do not have disabilities.

As will become evident by reviewing this preliminary design, *Jugando para aprender* (*Playing to Learn*, our tentative title) is based on current research into parenting and guidelines advocated by national organizations that work with parents and children and advocate for strong school-family relationships. Our overall approach is to demonstrate how the everyday activities of parents and children in the home present invaluable opportunities for learning. The foundation of this program is to stimulate the awareness of parents and assist them in taking better advantage of these opportunities by presenting models of creative, positive behaviors.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our research and interviews with experts and practitioners show that, in order to be successful, a training package that works with parents must be culturally sensitive. In other words, what an intervention approach that works with one population may not work with another.

Our research indicated the need to target Hispanic audiences due to the prevalence of disability and the growing size of the Hispanic audiences. The Hispanic population represents 9% of the U.S. population and is expected to be the largest minority group in the United States by early in the next century. The U.S. Hispanic population has less access to services (including health care, education, and vocational rehabilitation) than either Whites or Blacks in the United States. Most significantly, about 1 in every 15 Americans with a disability is Hispanic according to a draft report issued in 1994. (For additional information on the U.S. Hispanic population, see Chapter 1.)

To be successful, this training package must, then, be engineered to address three distinct groups:

- **Hispanic families.** As of 1991, more than 28% of Hispanics lived below the federal poverty level; two of every five Hispanic children are poor. Lack of educational attainment has been called the single greatest cause of Hispanic poverty -- and the language barrier is often cited as a reason why Hispanic parents have traditionally not been involved in strong parent-school relationships.

- **Teachers and administrators.** Too frequently, even among well-intentioned teachers and administrators, cultural differences present barriers to educational and family services for Hispanic Americans. As this feasibility study has shown, culturally sensitive parent training that is tied to what children with disabilities do in school will have the positive "ripple effect" of strengthening the various relationships among children, parents, teachers, and administrators.

- **Other service providers.** Our proposed parenting program could be used not only in tandem with *Start with the Arts*, an existing early childhood educational curriculum, but also as an independent program. As such, it could be used by a variety of other public and private institutions and organizations that serve Hispanic families in the United States.

Although U.S. Hispanic families are the primary audience -- and the videotape will be designed to be of use independently by them -- the proposed training package will be designed to be of use to all three of these constituencies.

CONSIDERATIONS

The research activities undertaken during Phase I of this project and described in this report emphasize the practical realities of parenting training. In addition to helping parents to help their young children ages four to six prepare for mainstreamed programs by promoting psychomotor, social, and emotional development, parenting programming must inculcate in parents that they are their child's first and most important teacher. Parents also must begin to see that opportunities present themselves every day in the home as potential learning experiences for their children. In other words, they must begin to see themselves and their environment with enhanced potential.

These goals mandate that our proposed training package be built on cutting-edge research and that it speak to attitudes held by parents as well as the teachers, administrators, and other service providers who may recommend the package to their clients or respective constituencies. To address these considerations, VSA Educational Services has designed a package and training approach that are:

- **Well researched.** In order to treat the issues successfully that are related to helping parents who have a child with disabilities, VSA Educational Services had to determine both the state-of-the-art and the practical realities of parenting training. As demonstrated throughout this report, we have conducted an extensive review of the current literature on parenting, children with disabilities, and related fields, including cultural issues. In addition, we have worked firsthand with numerous experts and practitioners in the fields of parenting, early childhood education, early childhood special education, and art education (the majority of whom have had experience working with the Hispanic population) to broaden our understanding of the nature of parenting training and the kinds of strategies that work well with parents and children with disabilities. Our investigation also encompassed cultural issues as they relate to parenting training.

  The themes, content, and approaches identified in this research and evidenced in the design of our proposed training package reflect the most current theories of parenting and education, and the most recent research and demographics available on the Hispanic population in the United States.

- **Practical.** While research and theory must provide the foundation for the training package, the material must be presented in a way that is appropriate for specific situations in the home of a Hispanic family in the United States. To this end, the content, approach, and format of the proposed package have been selected and designed with the goal of experiential training (modeling) in activities that can be easily performed in the home without extra expense (or cleanup) and that can be adapted to a wide variety of similar circumstances in the home that present opportunities for learning.

- **Innovative.** One of the most incontrovertible recommendations of our experts was to "avoid the talking heads approach." Our training package will *not* just "give the facts" about disabilities in the Hispanic population, and neither will it seek to educate parents on parenting theory. Instead, it will provide a series of activities -- using "real people and places" -- that occur naturally in the home between parent and child during the course of a typical day.

  These activities, grounded in daily routines, will seek to alter behavior by modeling activities that take advantage of opportunities to promote learning. For example, helping the child get dressed in the morning could be used as an opportunity to teach the colors, textures, and shapes of different

pieces of clothing. It could also be used as an opportunity to teach body awareness by showing how clothes conform to the shape of the body.

- **Convenient.** Our research indicates that the training package must be easy to use if it is to be successful. To achieve this, we have designed the product as a series of activities (real-life vignettes) that could be viewed in one sitting or one-by-one. Each individual activity will seek to demonstrate how everyday situations are opportunities for potential learning experiences and how a little additional effort on the parent's part can promote the child's development.

In meeting these criteria, VSA Educational Services has developed a preliminary design document for a training package that will allow Hispanic parents to broaden their parenting skills and promote learning in their child with disabilities ages four to six. As will be demonstrated in the guiding principles for this program's development, the parenting training will, additionally, serve to strengthen the relationships among children, parents, teachers, and schools. When these relationships are strengthened, children with disabilities are most able to develop to their full potential.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Throughout the literature review and discussions with experts and practitioners, certain concepts emerged that shape the content, approach, and underlying philosophy of parenting training. Principal among these is the belief that practical approaches are more important than abstract theory in training for parents. The Design Team firmly expressed that parents, whose time and resources are often already stretched to the limit, need strategies to work with their child that can be easily integrated into the everyday routine and, in fact, can help them get through each day more successfully.

The Design Team identified the following principles as foundational in designing parent training to help promote the psychomotor, social, and emotional development in young children with disabilities ages four to six:

- **Parents are a child's first and most important teacher.** Experts recognize that parents are a child's first and most important teacher and with schools inviting and emphasizing the importance of parents participating in their child's education both in the classroom and at home.

- **Children learn best when what they learn at school is reinforced at home and learning is part of their routine.** Following naturally

from the above, not only are parents the primary influence during a child's years before school, but they also determine *what* is reinforced from school and *how* it is reinforced. Overwhelmingly, research and experience have shown that when parents and the school are working together for the child at his or her developmental level, a child with disabilities is served best. (For a child with disabilities, mixed signals can be powerfully confusing.) The members of our Design Team emphasized that learning for young children ages four to six should be active (as opposed to didactic) and exploratory, developing naturally out of their curiosity about the world.

- **Strengthening the skills of parents is beneficial to the entire family.** Members of the U.S. Congress were obviously convinced of the impact of the family on the development of a child with disabilities when, in 1986, they passed P.L. 99-457, which *mandates* IFSPs, Individualized *Family* [emphasis added] Service Plans. It had been increasingly recognized by researchers that families react in different ways to having a child with a disability, and that these various reactions can be an asset or a liability. Raising a child does not occur in a vacuum, and strengthening the skills of parents in promoting the ultimate functioning of the child serves not only the child but also the other members of the family who also are involved in the "marathon."

- **Arts play an important role in a child's learning.** The arts must provide the core of any curricula designed for young children ages four to six. In fact, our research confirmed that both experts and practitioners increasingly realize that arts and creative play are key learning strategies, not just the "icing on the cake." (An article in the January 1994 issue of *Curriculum Update* titled "Looking at Art Through New Eyes," makes this point eloquently.) The arts address the needs of the whole child, promoting the development of his or her intelligence in the seven kinds of ways outlined by developmental psychologist Howard Gardner -- linguistic, musical, logical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. And, because arts activities are "fun" and nonthreatening, both children and parents are more likely to become involved.

In reading these guiding principles, most teachers, administrators, and other service providers who serve parents and children would recognize elements of existing programming. They also would recognize that improving the parenting skills of parents with children who have disabilities would be a natural extension of their missions.

PRODUCT TO BE DEVELOPED

During Phase II of this project, VSA Educational Services will develop a set of complementary training materials that can be used to supplement the parenting programs and resources that may be available from schools and from other public and private institutions and organizations that serve parents and children, particularly those that serve Hispanic families. In addition, the materials will be designed to be used in tandem with *Start with the Arts*, an early childhood educational program that uses the arts to provide meaningful learning experiences in mainstreamed settings for young children with disabilities. The package, in Spanish appropriate for a U.S. Hispanic audience, will be custom-designed and professionally produced.

The individual elements of the package are:

- ***Juganda para aprender* (*Playing to Learn*, videotape).** The videotape will focus the attention of parents on the possibilities for promoting learning in everyday situations in the home. The major content areas (as described below) will be treated in a variety of realistic ways on the video, and the supporting print material will offer additional ways that parents can promote learning based on behaviors modeled in the videotape. Video footage will feature realistic scenarios and will be produced in Spanish. Attention will be paid to making sure that the Spanish used will be understood by Hispanics living in the United States.

- ***Casa muy divertida* (*House Full of Fun*, handbook of extended activities).** The handbook will be designed both as an extension of the behaviors modeled in the videotape and as a stand-alone piece. It will include additional activities based around everyday events and safety tips, including how to accommodate the needs of children with orthopedic disabilities or other conditions that impair mobility. The handbook also will give ideas on how to include other children in the family in the activities.

PRODUCT DESIGN

The findings recorded in the preceding pages point to a need for parent training that is tied to what children with disabilities do in school, which has the positive overall effect of strengthening the various relationships among children, parents, teachers, and schools. Research and experience have shown that when these relationships are strengthened, children with disabilities are most able to develop to their full potential. For those reasons, the parenting training package will be designed to be used both in tandem with the *Starts with the Arts* early childhood educational program or as an independent program.

The field test version of *Start with the Arts* has already been developed and produced by Very Special Arts, the non-profit affiliate of VSA Educational Services. *Start with the Arts* is an instructional program designed to be used in mainstreamed settings that enables teachers and parents to create meaningful learning experiences for young children utilizing all of the arts -- visual arts, creative movement, creative drama, and music. The program also includes a learning log called *Learn Along at Home*, which lists specific questions that parents can ask the child about the day's learning activities in school and also provides a list of suggested activities for the parents and child to do at home that build on and extend that learning. The program has received high marks for its abilities to motivate both children and their parents and to use arts and creative play as key learning strategies.

The parenting training package also can be used independently of *Start with the Arts*. Because it is designed as a videotape program that models behaviors, it will be particularly helpful for parents with limited reading skills. (Only a little more than half of all Hispanics in the U.S. have completed four years of high school or more.) The videotape will include 10-12 real-life vignettes that will seek to demonstrate h everyday situations are opportunities for potential learning experiences d how a modicum of additional effort on the parent's part can promote the child's development. Video footage will feature realistic scenarios and will be produced in Spanish.

To ensure that the package design is pedagogically sound, we will continue our partnerships with the George Washington University Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, the Rosemount Center/El Centro Rosemount, Parent Action, and Very Special Arts. These organizations will participate in the design, field testing, and evaluation phases. (A description of each is included in Chapter 4.)

MAJOR CONTENT AREAS

In outlining the major content areas for the training package, the Design Team determined that the package should use the same four categories of an arts curriculum established in the *Start with the Arts* program. (These four categories are the foundation of most other early childhood programs as well.) The four major arts areas that will be covered in the training package are:

- the visual arts;
- creative movement;
- creative drama; and
- music.

The activities will be presented in a way that is appropriate for specific situations in the home of a U.S. Hispanic family, avoiding altogether the "talking heads" approach (a heartfelt recommendation of the Design Team). The content, approach, and format will be selected and designed with the goal of modeling activities that occur throughout the course of a typical day that can be used to promote learning. Both the videotape and the handbook will be developed and produced in Spanish and divided into sections appropriate for Morning, Noon and Afternoon, and Night.

Morning

Morning activities will be based on waking up, getting up and getting dressed, and eating breakfast. Sample activities could include the following:

- As the parent is assisting the child to get dressed in the morning, the parent asks the child to identify different parts of the body and describe what each body part can do.

- The parent asks the child what clothes he or she wants to wear that day. The parent also talks with the child about the clothes that were chosen -- the textures and colors, and if they are right for the weather outside.

Noon

The noon and afternoon activities will be based eating lunch, taking a ride in the car, and playing outside.

- When the parent and the child are in the car together, the parent asks the child to listen to the sounds that he or she can hear, such as horns and sirens. The parent then asks the child to imitate the sounds heard.

- When the parent and child are walking together, the parent would ask the child to notice the shapes of clouds and what they look like.

Night

The nighttime activities would be based on eating dinner, watching television, storytelling or reading, and getting ready for bed.

- While making supper, the parent would tell the child a story, leaving blanks for the child to fill in. ("Once, there was a little boy named _____, who was very, very hungry. He could even hear his stomach growl, and it sounded like this: _____ . So, _____ went into the kitchen, and . . .")

- The parent would find a television program that contains music (without lyrics). The parent would ask the child to close his or her eyes and describe what the music sounds like and how it makes him or her feel.

By providing a variety of activities, parents should begin to see that opportunities present themselves throughout the day as potential learning experiences for their children. In other words, parents will begin to see themselves, the home, and the "daily routine" with enhanced potential.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOME

By offering parenting training in the context of developing skills and behaviors that promote learning, the proposed training package will assist the child who has disabilities in preparing for mainstreaming. The package also will empower parents, assisting them in taking an enhanced role as their child's most important teacher. And, because these activities are done in the home (with the videotape and handbook containing ideas on how to include the rest of the family), the parenting training package we are proposing will be beneficial to the rest of the family as well. It will, additionally, promote the kind of family involvement mandated by P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457. And finally, it will encourage lifelong learning for parents and their children.

Chapter 4

INDUSTRY SUPPORT

The primary goal of the proposed training program is to provide parents with the knowledge and skills to promote the psychomotor, social and emotional development of their young child with disabilities through the use of age-appropriate arts activities. In seeking to develop this program, VSA Educational Services realizes that the goal cannot be achieved without forming partnerships within the community of those whose mission it is to serve parents and children. To this end, we have involved premier leadership and training organizations in the feasibility study and will continue these relationships throughout the development of the training program.

The partnerships described below represent national networks of leadership organizations that have been at the forefront of developing innovative programming for parents and children with disabilities. Their work is recognized by their peers in the industry, and their involvement in the development of the proposed training package provides both expertise for development and venues for field testing of the product, as well as established reputations for high-quality programming among educational organizations across the country.

We are confident that our collaboration with these organizations in product development will lead to industry-wide support of the training program. These partnerships also advance the mission of the Department of Education's SBIR program by building a strong coalition to promote research, development, and commercial application for programming that paves the way for the integration of young children with disabilities into the mainstream.

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER PREPARATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Established in 1821, George Washington University is located near the White House and the National Academy of Sciences in downtown Washington, DC. It is committed to preserving a curriculum that embodies the content and spirit of the liberal arts and promotes academic specialization and professional education; fostering respect and communication among different cultures; and maintaining a continuing process of institutional self-assessment and adaptation to meet the rapidly changing needs of society. It is a member of the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area, a professional collegial relationship among 10 universities in the Washington, DC, area. Today, enrollment its eight academic units includes more than 6,000 undergraduate students and more than 9,000 graduate students.

NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS) assists states and other designated governing jurisdictions as they develop multidisciplinary, coordinated, and comprehensive services for children with special needs, birth through age 8 years, and their families. Members of the collaborating system are the Department of Special Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Georgetown University Child Development Center; National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE); National Center for Clinical Infant Programs (NCCIP); and the National Parent Network on Disabilities. The NEC*TAS collaborative system is funded through the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, as part of Public Law 99-457, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has as one of its primary objectives to be the best national source of information regarding education for individuals with disabilities. NASDSE has committed itself to facilitating the achievement of several key goals by the year 2000. Among them, it hopes to ensure that the needs of all children are identified and met without reference to assigned labels or categories of disability; to help schools provide family-focused, one-stop support for comprehensive health-care, child-care, and intervention services, and effective preschool opportunities; and to help schools treat diversity as a strength by including parents as full partners in the education of their children.

PARENT ACTION

Parent Action is a national membership association that works in partnership with parents to improve the quality of life for America's families raising children. Parent Action works to bring public attention to such important issues as child care, violence, education, family support, and health care, and serves as a catalyst to bring parents together to restore a sense of community and advocate family supportive policies and practices in the workplace, government, and the media. Parent Action also provides specific services and information to assist parents in balancing their multiple roles as parents, workers, citizens, and family members. The organization is open to parents, grandparents, and others concerned about strengthening and supporting parents' ability to parent effectively.

THE ROSEMOUNT CENTER/EL CENTRO ROSEMOUNT

The mission of the Rosemount Center/El Centro Rosemount is to provide quality bilingual child development programs that foster the emotional, physical, cognitive, and social development of children. Rosemount is strongly committed to serve and advocate for the interests of families of diverse backgrounds. It emphasizes the understanding and appreciation of humanistic and cross-cultural values in a bilingual setting; the maintenance of community ties; and the development of opportunities for educational research to enhance the fulfillment of these fundamental principles.

VERY SPECIAL ARTS

Very Special Arts (VSA), the non-profit affiliate of VSA Educational Services, considers this project an important vehicle for furthering its mission to bring persons with disabilities into the societal mainstream. Established in 1974 as an educational affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, VSA is designed by Congress as the national coordinating organization on arts and disabilities. VSA has affiliate programs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, as well as in 55 countries around the world. Almost 2 million people around the world take part in VSA programs every year. The role of VSA in the development and marketing of the proposed parenting videotape will be most evident in Phase III.

VSA is the creator and publisher of *Start with the Arts*. As we envision the parenting video, it will be a stand alone companion piece. VSA has agreed to serve as publisher of this parenting video. In addition, dissemination and technical assistance will be readily available through the VSA network. Indeed, VSA is currently running a multi-year model demonstration programs of *Start with the Arts* in four citites. This will be an excellent way to test and publicize the videotape.

COMMERCIAL APPLICATIONS

The need for the proposed training package is indicated by the willingness of the above-mentioned organizations to commit time and resources to help in its development. Indeed, this collaboration speaks directly to the viability of the product. Given the interest of the various national organizations in the product expressing during our interviews, we have decided to further investigate dissemination options during the development phase to ensure that we maximize its availability and usefulness.

In line with the product's viability, Very Special Arts has already developed and produced the field test version of *Start with the Arts*, an

instructional program that enables teachers and parents to create meaningful learning experiences for young children utilizing all of the arts -- visual arts, creative movement, creative drama, and music. Designed to be implemented in mainstreamed settings, *Start with the Arts* assists young children, including those with disabilities, in exploring thematic topics commonly taught in early childhood programs through the arts. Each arts activity in *Start with the Arts* includes both thinking and literacy skills in addition to its arts objective.

Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this feasibility study, *Start with the Arts* also includes parent materials, called *Learn Along at Home*, in which art activities are extended for home use. The *Learn Along at Home* component of *Start with the Arts* provides, naturally, an existing link between school and home, which our research indicates is a key component of the success of a parent training program.

As indicated by the above discussion, the possibilities for commercial applications are as diverse as the needs and uses for the program. We are confident that both the demand for and the flexibility of the proposed parent training videotape will ensure that it will have both a broad market and a long shelf life.

PHASE II FUNDING

As evidenced throughout this final report, we have laid the groundwork for full-scale development of the proposed parenting program during Phase II. Our research points to a need for parent training that is built on the existing strengths of families, tied to what children with disabilities do in school, and culturally sensitive.

Therefore, VSA Educational Services fully intends to pursue Phase II funding for our parenting program through the Department of Educational Small Business Innovation Research program.

Appendix A

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PARENTING AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Appendix B

Interview Instrument

Parenting Videotape
Telephone Interview

Interviewee:
Date:
Title:
Expertise:
Phone: Fax:
Affiliation:
Address:

A. Demographic background

A.1. Experience in early childhood education?

Years?

What type?

A.2. Experience working with children with potential learning difficulties?

Years?

Specialty?

A.3. Experience working with parents of children with potential learning difficulties?

Years?

A.4. Experience in cultural diversity?

Years?

Particular ethnic groups?

A.5. Experience in program development?

Years?

Development? Delivery?

B. Audience

B.1. How would you describe your basic constituency?

B.2. What adaptations (if any) were made to your program to include parents of children with potential learning difficulties into your programming?

B.3. How is your program delivered?

C. Young Children

C.1. What are the learning needs of young children aged 4, 5, or 6?

C.2. What are the best methods to address those needs?

C.3. What is the arts' role in addressing those needs?

C.4. Are there specific skills, practices, or attitudes that children with potential learning difficulties (aged 4, 5, or 6) must develop to succeed in school?

C.5. How do you teach these skills, practices, or attitudes?

D. Parents

D.1. What roles do parents play in helping young children with potential learning difficulties to learn?

D.2. Are there specific skills, practices, or attitudes that parents need to promote learning?

D.3. What are the most effective ways to teach these skills, practices, or attitudes?

D.4. What role do the arts play in conveying these skills, practices, or attitudes?

D.5. How would you describe the relationship between parents and children with potential learning difficulties?

D.6. What methods do you use to promote parent involvement in their children's education?

D.7. What methods do you use to increase cooperation between parents and teachers?

D.8. How do you address barriers of parents that might prevent a child from developing his or her potential?

E. Proposed Parenting Video

E.1. Do you know of existing programs for parents of children with potential learning difficulties?

E.2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these programs?

E.3. How would you envision the content of such a parenting video?

Innovative parenting strategies?

Specialized activities?

E.4. How would you design the video to appeal to parents?

E.5. How would you make parents aware of a training program?

E.6. How would you disseminate this program?

F. Additional Comments